The turn of the century saw Afro-Americans at their lowest ebb in their pursuit of social, economic, and political justice. W. E. B. Du Bois looked upon the first part of the twentieth century as "more critical than the Reconstruction years," and historian John Hope Franklin condemned it as a "bleak plateau in freedom's climb." This nadir in black history manifested itself in the literature, which continued the past century's themes of protest, moral living, and racial uplift, but adding standards for race improvement that, it was hoped, would lead to white acceptance.

The women fiction writers who were precursors of the New Negro Movement were not as recognizable as their black male writing counterparts, W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charles W. Chesnutt, and James Weldon Johnson. They were few in number, and young Fisk University student Virginia B. Miller, writing in the school's literary magazine, the *Fisk Herald* (1901), urged Negro women to contribute more to their literature and "show the world that we are capable of succeeding in such attempts."

Pauline E. Hopkins was the first black woman to publish a novel

at the beginning of the century. Her *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life, North and South* (1900) appeared the same year as Charles W. Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars,* but did not make the same impact as Chesnutt's. Whereas Chesnutt was published by the established white house of Houghton Mifflin, Hopkins's imprint was that of the small newly organized Colored Co-operative Publishing Company of Boston, where she was a shareholder and board of directors member.

In all likelihood, even if Hopkins had chosen to submit her manuscript to a white publisher, it would have been rejected because of its nature. Carole McAlpine Watson has judged it to be "the most forceful protest novel written by a black American woman prior to Ann Petry's *The Street.*" Hopkins's elements of post-Reconstruction lynchings, sexual abuses, and social and economic oppression were not the grist for white publishers' book mills. Also, it is likely that Hopkins, being a race-conscious woman, as she described herself, would have preferred a black publishing company to issue her work.

Contending Forces contributed strongly to the Afro-American feminist literary tradition. Black feminist critic Claudia Tate credits Hopkins with offering "a tentative program for the advancement of black Americans in general and black American women in particular." This is sustained in Hopkins's chapter "The Sewing Circle" in *Contending Forces* in which Mrs. Willis deems "the advancement of the colored woman should be the new problem in the woman question that should float her upon its tide into the prosperity she desired." Mrs. Willis is Hopkins's prototype of a cultured middle-class black woman who leads a comfortable life, is knowledgeable about the race, and wants to counter stereotypes of the black woman's immorality. In her talk to the sewing circle's young women, she praises virtuous women as race builders.

Pauline E. Hopkins has now been recognized in Afro-American literature after lengthy years of neglect by white and black male critics. She came to my attention when I happened upon a small collection of her papers in the Special Collections of the Fisk University Library. Realizing that she was a foremother who deserved to be rediscovered, I published an article about her with the purpose of giving new exposure to a woman who deserves more recognition. She is now being placed in proper perspective by such critics as Claudia Tate, Carole McAlpine Watson, and Vashti Lewis. Just as Hugh M. Gloster

thought the publication of Chesnutt's folk stories in the *Atlantic Monthly* represented the "coming-of-age of Negro literature in the United States," so, unheralded, did the publication of Hopkins's *Contending Forces* mark the coming-of-age of the Afro-American feminist literary tradition.

It was eight years after *Contending Forces* appeared that another black woman, Sarah Lee Brown Fleming, published a novel. Her *Hope's Highway* (1918) symbolized the black racial problems of the age and proposed ways of coping with them. Her plot revolves around the national controversy between black leaders Booker T. Washington, who founded the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and was accepted by whites as the spokesperson for the black race, and W. E. B. Du Bois, Fisk- and Harvard-trained historian and scholar. Washington, an accommodationist, sought to mollify white southerners by advocating social separation of the races and industrial education for his people. Du Bois opposed this line of conciliation, advocating a more assertive stance for equality, suffrage, and the education of the black intelligentsia, the "Talented Tenth."

Fleming's *Hope's Highway,* published three years after Washington's death, obviously borrowed from the national dispute. The story concerns a school in the South, Vance Institute (possibly Tuskegee about which Fleming wrote a poem in her *Clouds and Sunshine*), which changes its curriculum from industrial education to the liberal arts. This act is denounced by a white racist politician, Joe Vardam, whose character is no doubt based on a Mississippi white supremacist of the time, J. K. Vardaman. As a result of Vardam's opposition, "the leader" of the school (who represents Booker T. Washington) dies of a broken heart. Fleming's message for racial acceptance is cast in terms of education and leadership.

Another novel, *The Resentment* (1921) by Mary Etta Spencer, also bears evidence of the Washington–Du Bois conflict. Spencer's "rags to riches" story concerns a young black man who becomes a successful hog-raising entrepreneur, thereby embodying Washington's concept of "business enterprise" for "racial elevation" and self-esteem through entry into the "all-powerful business and commercial world." This is emphasized when the protagonist, Silas Miller, says to himself: "I shall not always be a nigger, I am going to be a business man, and men will take their hats off—well, we'll take our hats off together." Silas is envisioning white men taking their hats off to him in

respect for his business accomplishments, which will dignify his racial status.

Lillian E. Wood's novel, *"Let My People Go"* (1922) carried on the inspirational themes of leadership and achievement as anodynes for racial woes. Wood also reiterated Pauline E. Hopkins's message of virtuous black women imparting a positive image to the race—which was incongruous with the drive by the white women of this period to effect social reforms in order to free women from Victorian mores. For black women, ennobling a downtrodden race was more important.

Zara Wright's *Black and White Tangled Threads* (1920) and its sequel, *Kenneth* (1920), reflected the melodramatic romance novels of the nineteenth century. The uniqueness of the first book lay in its mulatto story with a different twist; it showed the effects of miscegenation upon a white antebellum southern family who acknowledges a mulatto as a legitimate family member. The author sermonized for education to support race progress and accord. Wright, like the rest of her female contemporaries, was more concerned with spinning propaganda than presenting a story with a valid plot and characters. This was the weakness in their fiction; nevertheless, their will to write must be acknowledged.

While these novelists were protesting racial injustices and proposing ways to advance the race, Amelia E. Johnson, in her last novel, *Martina Meriden; or, What Is My Motive?* (1901), presented yet another moralistic story revolving around young white characters. Maggie Shaw-Fullilove, another obscure black woman novelist, delivered a different message in *Who Was Responsible?* (1919), published by the Abingdon Press of Cincinnati. I have not seen this book, but it is said to deal with the evils of alcohol, a problem taken up earlier by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper in her poetry and lectures as a temperance worker.

None of these women novelists gained widespread literary recognition. They were black writers at a time when white women writers were prodigious "producers of novels," as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Guber have pointed out. Nevertheless they were forming a nucleus of their own, furnishing models for future black women writers.

As in the late nineteenth century, there was a profusion of women poets writing pastoral poems, lyrics, and eulogies. Among these was Myra Viola Wilds, author of *Thoughts of Idle Hours* (1915).

Wilds, a native of Mount Ollie, Kentucky, was a seamstress who began writing poetry after losing her eyesight in 1911. A year later, she had completed a book of fifty-three poems in "her own hand." The last poem, "Waiting in the Shadow," tells of her courage and unflagging spirit while she awaits "the coming of the light." Effie T. Battle, a poet and teacher born in Okolona, Mississippi, of poor parents, wrote poems that appeared in newspapers and magazines. By 1914, she had brought out a volume, *Gleanings from Dixie Land.*

H. Cordelia Ray was more well known, writing what Gloria T. Hull called "mannered bookish poetry." Her career spanned the turn of the century when she published a second book, *Poems,* in 1910. Olivia Ward Bush, a newly appreciated poet and playwright whose career also began in the nineteenth century, gained a reputation as a poet with her book, *Driftwood* (1914). The Thompson sisters, Priscilla Jane and Clara Ann, were represented in anthologies, but not generally admired. Clara Ann's poems in *Songs from the Wayside* (1908) and *A Garland of Poems* (1926) were less antagonistic toward whites than were Priscilla Jane's *Ethiope Lays* (1900) and *Gleanings of Quiet Hours* (1907).

Afro-American women may have been more inclined to write poetry than prose, for it offered a ready means of expressing their creativity. Clara Ann Thompson, for example, wanted to write a novel but never did. Prose writing may have been too time-consuming, or she may have been uncertain of her skills. Many of the writers were self-educated, had only minimal formal schooling, or at best were graduates of normal schools.

It was not until 1918 when Georgia Douglas Johnson published *The Heart of a Woman and Other Poems* that an early twentieth-century black woman poet gained more than a little attention. Johnson's success, prior to the New Negro Movement, can be attributed to a number of circumstances. First, she lived in the East, where the New Negro Movement would take hold, and she was a friend of leading black male literary figures. The eminent anthologist and critic, William Stanley Braithwaite, wrote the introduction to *The Heart of a Woman,* and W. E. B. Du Bois contributed a foreword to her second book, *Bronze: A Book of Verse* (1922). Johnson thus had a foot in the door, which helped her gain recognition for her writing. Modern-day critics have called her work "conventional" and have criticized the "sameness of her themes and manner." Nevertheless, she broke out

of the Victorian mold of black women poets by exploring intimate women's themes with "candor of expression."

Afro-American women writers at the outset of the twentieth century now tried their hand at a new genre, drama. Fiction and poetry writers began to experiment with plays, using interracial and intraracial subjects. Angelina Weld Grimké's play *Rachel* (1916) was a precedent-setting model for women playwrights and others.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson's one-act drama, *Mine Eyes Have Seen*, was written near the close of World War I in 1918. Its theme was racism and patriotism, and it was presented by the children of the school where Dunbar taught. The plot concerns Chris, a young black, wrestling over being called to service. He harbors bitter memories of a jealous southern mob burning his family's home because they lived in a "decent house." His father was killed defending it, and Chris, his mother, sister, and brother were forced to flee north. But loyalty to his nation and pride in his race win out as Chris is told by a settlement worker, "your race is calling you to carry on its good name." Dunbar-Nelson used Julia Ward Howe's Civil War song, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" at the end to drum up the emotions and patriotism of her audience.

Mary Burrill, a Washington schoolteacher, followed a year later with a play published in the *Birth Control Review* entitled *They That Sit in Darkness*. The darkness represents women's ignorance about birth control. Truly a feminist play, as well as one dealing with classism, it deplores the predicament of poor women whose lack of knowledge of birth control dooms them to incessant childbearing, which keeps them locked in poverty and ill health, and restricts them to the home. Malinda Jasper is a poor black rural southern woman who is the mother of ten children, eight living and two dead. She has just had another child, which she had been warned against because of a heart condition. The visiting nurse is permitted by law to tell her only to be "careful." She dies on the day her daughter Lindy is preparing to go to Tuskegee. As a result, Lindy is forced to stay home to care for the children. This may well have been the first black feminist play. It dwelt not on race but on birth control, emphasizing a woman's right to know.

The young century's blatant racism, expressed through disfranchisement, segregation, and the reign of white supremacy, strengthened the awareness of blacks for the need to promote black history

and pride in the race. Blacks were being ridiculed in minstrel shows with "coon" songs and "darky" jokes, and white writers were denigrating them in their books. Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905) was made into the notorious movie *The Birth of a Nation* by D. W. Griffith, from which he made a fortune.

To counter these negative images, blacks began to compile anthologies and write books of black history and black leaders. They did not realize they were also planting the seeds for the New Negro Movement, which espoused black identity. Alice Dunbar-Nelson's *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence: The Best Speeches Delivered by the Negro from the Days of Slavery to the Present Time* (1914) included the speeches of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Fanny Jackson Coppin, and Dunbar-Nelson herself. Her second anthology, *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer: Containing the Best Prose and Poetic Selections by and about the Negro Race* (1920), was designed to stimulate race pride and knowledge among young people. Also working with black youth in mind, Mrs. Leila Amos Pendleton assembled a history book for children ages twelve to fourteen. Her *Narrative of the Negro* (1912) recorded facts left out of other history books about Afro-Americans' contributions to history. And Laura Eliza Wilkes, a Washington, D.C., teacher, spent six years researching colonial records, state papers, assembly journals, and histories of slavery for her *Missing Pages in American History, Revealing the Services of Negroes in the Early Wars in the United States of America, 1641–1815* (1919).

Collective biographies sought to instill race respect by highlighting black achievers. Elizabeth Ross Haynes *Unsung Heroes* (1921) presented a group of black leaders of the past and the present. Delilah L. Beasley, Los Angeles journalist, concentrated on black pioneers in *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (1919).

Also during this period, Maud Cuney Hare, a highly intelligent and versatile woman, wrote a biography about her father, *Norris Wright Cuney: A Tribune of the Black People* (1913), which reflected the courage of her father and herself as well. The delineation of a middle-class black family living in the South when racism was rampant is valuable documentation for social and literary history.

Numerous autobiographies recounted religious experiences and postslavery memories. A woman minister continued the personal stories of sexism in the black church in her autobiography, *Life of Mrs.*

Helena Arkansas Mason (1902). A member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Mrs. Mason repeats the earlier stories of Jarena Lee and Amanda Berry Smith of male animosity toward female ministers. Born in Quincy, Illinois, in 1864, she spent forty years as an evangelist holding revival services in the Middle West. Baptist ministers, believing only men should preach, tried to thwart her religious activities. Even Bishop B. T. Tanner of her own denomination fought her: "He, Bishop Tanner, spoke against me, and forbid his men having me to help them." Mrs. Mason died in 1924 after having guided more than "100,000 souls to Christ."

Mrs. Frances A. Joseph Gaudet's *He Leadeth Me* (1913), published by herself in New Orleans, tells of living in Mississippi with her grandparents after her father was killed in the Civil War, and then in New Orleans with her mother. Her story is one of courage and endurance in surviving.

Susie King Taylor's *Reminiscences of My Life with the 33d United States Colored Troops Late 1st S.C. Volunteers* (1902) enriched the Civil War saga with a black woman's point of view and offered her reflections on Reconstruction. Another book about war as experienced by black women was *Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces* (1920) by Addie W. Hunton and Kathryn M. Johnson. It was a singular account of their World War I involvement in France as YMCA welfare workers among black troops. They reported the prejudices and harassments of black soldiers by white officers, and the bigoted attitudes of white secretaries of the YMCA toward black troops and the two women themselves. One black soldier, having fought for two days at the front without food and water, was not allowed to buy a package of cookies when he came across a YMCA hut. Other revelations make for pathetic reading about black soldiers fighting on foreign soil for a freedom not accorded them. Photographs and poems by Georgia Douglas Johnson and Paul Laurence Dunbar are scattered throughout the text.

Through these literary accomplishments, Afro-American women writers were becoming more certain of themselves as a woman force and as writers. Their new confidence was reflected in the founding of the monthly magazine *Woman's Voice* in 1919, a periodical "By Woman—Of Woman—For Woman." An editorial of 1923 addressed the fact that women of color needed a medium, set apart for their progress and achievements.

From these women's writing, it can be seen that they were not silent or idle prior to the New Negro Movement. Although unheralded, they were proving themselves to be the "capable" writers the young Fisk student so wanted them to be.

Sarah Lee Brown Fleming, *Hope's Highway*

1919 Maggie Shaw Fullilove, *Who Was Responsible?*

Laura Eliza Wilkes, *Missing Pages in American History, Revealing the Services of Negroes in the Early Wars in the United States of America, 1641–1815*

Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*

Mamie Jordan Carver, *As It Is; or, The Conditions under Which the Race Problem Challenges the White Man's Solution*

Charlotte Hawkins Brown, *"Mammy": An Appeal to the Heart of the South*

1920 Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer: Containing the Best Prose and Poetic Selections by and about the Negro*

Zara Wright, *Black and White Tangled Threads*

Zara Wright, *Kenneth*

Addie W. Hunton and Kathryn M. Johnson, *Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces*

Carrie Law Morgan Figgs, *Poetic Pearls*

Angelina Weld Grimké, *Rachel: A Play in Three Acts*

Sarah Lee Brown Fleming, *Clouds and Sunshine*

1921 Elizabeth Ross Haynes, *Unsung Heroes*

Carrie Law Morgan Figgs, *Nuggets of Gold*

Mary Etta Spencer, *The Resentment*

1922 Carrie Williams Clifford, *The Widening Light*

Lillian E. Wood, *"Let My People Go"*

J. Pauline Smith, *"Exceeding Riches" and Other Verse*

Georgia Douglas Johnson, *Bronze: A Book of Verse*

1923 Carrie Law Morgan Figgs, *Select Plays: Santa Claus Land, Jepthah's Daughter, The Prince of Peace, Bachelor's Convention*

Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins

1859–1930

At the age of fifteen, Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins won a prize of ten dollars in gold for writing the best essay on the "Evils of Intemperance and Their Remedy." The contest was sponsored by the Congregational Publishing Society of Boston among the colored youth of the local schools. The award for her first writing effort was presented by William Wells Brown, first black novelist and playwright.

Born in Portland, Maine, in 1859,[1] Pauline was the daughter of Northup Hopkins, a Virginian, and Sarah Allen, of Exeter, New Hampshire. William A. Hopkins, a tailor and GAR veteran of the Civil War, became her stepfather. Her mother was a descendant of the Paul brothers, one of whom founded the historic St. Paul Baptist Church in Boston. She was also the grandniece of poet and editor James W. Whitfield. When quite young, she was brought to Boston to live and graduated from the Boston Girls High School.

She began her writing pursuits as a playwright, composing a four-act musical drama, *Peculiar Sam; or, the Underground Railroad* (1879). Later modified to three acts, it was presented as *Slaves' Escape; or the Underground Railroad* at the Oakland Garden by the Hopkins Colored Troubadours, which included Pauline, her mother, and her stepfather, with the famous Hyers Sisters by request and a chorus of over sixty people. Opening on 5 July 1880,

it ran for a week before receptive audiences and received commendable reviews. The Hopkins Colored Troubadours also gave recitals and concerts featuring guitar playing by W. A. Hopkins and southern jubilee songs. Pauline was praised by the press for her "beautiful voice" and was called "Boston's favorite Colored Soprano."

Because she needed more financial stability, she studied stenography and in 1892 was hired by two affluent Republican politicians. She went on to become a stenographer for the Bureau of Statistics on the Massachusetts Census of 1895 for four years. During this time, she began to lecture on black history in churches and schools.

Pauline E. Hopkins's recognition as a fiction writer came when she was in her forties and "coincided with the appearance of the fine Negro publication, the *Colored American*, in May, 1900."[2] This monthly illustrated magazine, whose initial cover described it as being "Devoted to Literature, Science, Music, Art, Religion, Facts, Fiction and Traditions of the Negro Race," sold for fifteen cents a copy, or a dollar and a half for a year's subscription. It was the "first significant Afro-American journal to emerge in the twentieth century."[3]

The idea for the magazine came from Walter W. Wallace who, although he had no journalistic experience, envisioned a general magazine of creative and informative writing. In this endeavor, he was joined by three men who formed the Colored Co-operative Publishing Company in Boston. To sustain the company, certificates of deposit were advertised in the magazine, and Pauline E. Hopkins became a shareholder, member of the board of directors, and creditor with the publication of her novel. Her first short story, "The Mystery within Us," was published in the maiden issue of May 1900. Also at this time, it was announced that she would become editor of the Women's Department in June.

In September the Co-operative Publishing Company advertised the forthcoming October publication of her novel, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life in the North and South*. "The book publishing venture was an outgrowth of the magazine . . . and was intended as an outlet for books about Negroes and by Negro authorship."[4] This was indeed a stroke of good fortune for Miss Hopkins to become affiliated with a company that could publish her novel. Copyrighted by her in 1899, she had traveled the women's circuit, reading portions of it to the Women's Era Club of Boston and others.

The romantic historical novel was written in the manner of earlier black nineteenth-century novels, reflecting the problems of the post-Reconstruction era. The intricate story, which begins in the South and concludes in Boston, recounts incidents the author says in her preface actually occurred. It is a tale of miscegenation, family separations caused by slavery, and chaotic love lives enmeshed in jealous intrigue. The tragic mulatto, caught between

the hatred of blacks and the scorn of whites, is a prevailing theme, as in most of Miss Hopkins's fiction.

The characters give lengthy discourses on womanhood, prejudice, lynchings, and the uplifting of the race with views derived from the divergent philosophies of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. The title reflects the contrasting incentives that motivate black leaders. Some are prompted by monetary and self-serving gains; others, more conscious of the race, are moved by humanitarianism. These are the "contending forces" the author perceived as "dooming" the race to "despair."

The complicated plot begins with Charles Montford and his fair-skinned wife, Grace, moving from Bermuda to North Carolina with their slaves and two sons, Charles and Jesse. A diabolical neighbor, Anson Pollock, detects the mixed blood in Grace, but still desires her. Angered by Grace's rejection of him and Montford's plan to free his slaves, Pollock has Montford killed and his slaves sold. Overcome by these events, Grace commits suicide. Charles is bought from Pollock by an English mineralogist who takes him to England. Jesse, Pollock's valet, escapes to Boston. The remainder of the story tells of Jesse's grandchildren, Cora and Will Smith, who portray a proper middle-class black family. Will, dedicated to his race, vies with John Pollock Langely, a self-serving black descendant of Anson Pollock, for the love of a beautiful mulatto, Sappho Clark.

The 402-page novel sold for one dollar and fifty cents. It was promoted by the *Colored American Magazine* as "a book that will not only appeal strongly to the race everywhere, but will have a large sale among the whites."

In May 1903, the *Colored American Magazine* changed hands, and Miss Hopkins was hired to be its literary editor. Of this appointment, she candidly wrote: "I was engaged as literary editor because I was well-known as a race writer, had gained the confidence of my people, and also because there seemed to be at that time, no one else as well qualified to fill the position, for as yet the editing of a high-class magazine was puzzling work even to our best scholars."[5] Miss Hopkins started at a salary of seven dollars a week, which was later raised another dollar after the typist was dismissed and she took over the additional duties. On this, she supported a bedridden mother.

As literary editor of "the strongest Negro organ put upon the market since the days of Frederick Douglass,"[6] she laid the "foundation for a new black journalism,"[7] for which she has not received just recognition. Aligned with a group of radical editors of protest journalism, she, along with W. E. B. Du Bois and Monroe Trotter, fought the powerful accommodationist philosophy of Booker T. Washington. A valiant editor, she "made no attempt to modify the magazine's expressions out of consideration for the white persons from whom most of the support was obtained."[8] Unyielding in her opinion that blacks should not follow a conciliatory line with regard to whites, she promoted the literature of protest by "agitating the south."

She strove to make the magazine a truly literary one, for which she hoped that "Race writers" would enter "an era of strong competition in the field of letters." Through articles on education, religion, politics, music, art, and black history, the publication sought to counter white charges of racial inferiority. Feature articles of an international scope dealt with Africa, Siam, India, Panama, and the Philippines. Well-established and emerging writers were published, such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Angelina Grimké, Gertrude Mossell, Benjamin Griffith Brawley, Olivia Ward Bush, James Corrothers, and William Stanley Braithwaite.

A strong proponent of black history, which, Miss Hopkins lamented, was omitted from textbooks, she wrote a series of biographical sketches on "Famous Women of the Negro Race" and "Famous Men of the Negro Race." She was also a prolific fiction writer for the magazine, producing short stories and three serialized novels. Her first novel to appear in the *Colored American Magazine* was *Hagar's Daughter, A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice*, published in thirty-three chapters from March 1901 to March 1902. For this, she used the pseudonym of Sarah A. Allen, taken from her mother's name, Sarah Allen. Other articles and stories also bore this nom de plume. Hopkins had toyed previously with using a pen name as indicated in an early unpublished manuscript, "One Scene from the Drama of Early Days," an account of the biblical story of Daniel, which she signed Pauline E. Allen.[9]

In her fiction, Miss Hopkins continually dealt with the taboo subject of miscegenation, particularly white men married to mulattoes, and also utilized the themes of social protest and advancement of women. She acknowledged that "'Contending Forces' and my serial story 'Hagar's Daughter' . . . aroused the ire of the white South, male and female, against me."[10]

Two additional serialized novels followed, *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the Southwest* (May 1902–October 1902), and *Of One Blood; or, the Hidden Self*, which commenced immediately after *Winona* in November 1902 and concluded in November 1903. All were complicated stories of interracial romance. In reply to a white female reader who indignantly protested the recurring interracial themes, Miss Hopkins replied: "Marriage is made illegal between the races and yet the mulattoes increase. Thus the shadow of corruption falls on the blacks and on the whites, without whose aid the mulattoes would not exist."[11]

Pauline E. Hopkins worked hard and faithfully to make the magazine a success. She traveled throughout the country giving lectures to gain support and was one of the founders of the Colored American League in Boston, which tried to gather subscriptions and business for the publication. Under her editorship, the circulation grew to fifteen thousand. But in 1904, through poor management, the magazine became debt-ridden, and the powerful Booker T. Washington faction moved to take it over and mute its stand against Washington's views. Put up for purchase, it was bought by Washington and Fred R. Moore, an organizer and recording secretary of the National Negro Business League.

The headquarters of the *Colored American Magazine* were moved to New York, and T. Thomas Fortune became editor, while Pauline E. Hopkins was retained as assistant editor at a salary of twelve dollars a week. She accepted the offer on condition that she not be asked "to publicly renounce the rights of my people." After moving to New York, however, she discovered that she was to be "frozen out" for a nephew of Mrs. Booker T. Washington, Roscoe Conklin Simmons. By September, she was "forced to resign." The publishers masked her departure from the staff in the November 1904 issue, saying "On account of ill-health Miss Pauline Hopkins has found it necessary to sever her relations with this magazine."

Miss Hopkins's so-called ill-health did not prevent her from continuing to write. To the South's first black magazine, the *Voice of the South*, she contributed an article, "The New York Subway," in 1904 and a series on "The Dark Races of the Twentieth Century" from February to July 1905. She herself also published a thirty-one-page booklet, *A Primer of Facts Pertaining to the Early Greatness of the African Race and the Possibility of Restoration by Its Descendants—with Epilogue* (1905). Listed as Black Classics Series no. 1, she apparently intended to publish additional ones.

Once again Hopkins became an editor when the black New Era Publishing Company of Boston began *New Era* magazine in 1916. In it, she published a fiction serial, "Topsy Templeton," which purported to be about a "modern Topsy." The story tells of a little girl, daughter of a waitress in a wealthy white family, who is abandoned by her mother. Two white sisters give the child a name and place her with a respectable black family to rear into "noble womanhood." The story's purpose was to show the importance of individual effort in solving the race problem. Miss Hopkins also did biographical pieces for the magazine, which had a short publishing span.

Apparently discouraged by the lack of recognition for her efforts, she retreated from literary circles. To make a living, she went back to work as a stenographer for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A freak accident led to a painful death. She was suffering from neuritis, when her liniment-soaked flannel bandages caught fire from an oil stove. She died as a result of the burns on 13 August 1930.

Thus ended the life of a versatile editor, writer, novelist, playwright, and singer. Miss Hopkins had been a black leader inspired by the altruistic aspect of her "contending forces" and placing the welfare of her people above all else.

NOTES

1. The Massachusetts Department of Vital Statistics gives her age as seventy-one at the time of her death in 1930. Dorothy Porter, in the *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, gives Hopkins's birth date as 1856.
2. Shockley, "Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins," p. 24.
3. Abby Arthur Johnson and Ronald M. Johnson, "Away from Accommodation: Radical Editors and Protest Journalism, 1900–1910," *Journal of Negro History* 62 (July 1977):325.
4. William Stanley Braithwaite, "Negro America's First Magazine," *Negro Digest* 6 (December 1947):24.
5. Hopkins to W. M. Trotter, 16 April 1905, Charles S. Johnson Papers, Fisk University Library, Nashville, Tenn., p. 1.
6. Ibid., p. 8.
7. Johnson and Johnson, "Away from Accommodation," p. 325. An insightful account of Pauline E. Hopkins's tenure as editor of the *Colored American Magazine* is presented in this article.
8. Charles S. Johnson, "The Rise of the Negro Magazine," *Journal of Negro History* 12 (January 1928):13.
9. Pauline E. Hopkins Papers, Fisk University Library, Nashville, Tenn.
10. Hopkins to Trotter, p. 6.
11. Pauline E. Hopkins, "Reply to Letter to the Editor," *Colored American Magazine* 6 (March 1903):399.

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The Sewing-Circle

Where village statesmen talked with looks profound,
Imagination fondly stoops to trace
The parlor splendors of that festive place.

. . . . . .

Yes! let the rich deride, the proud disdain,
These simple blessings of the lowly train;
To me more dear,
One native charm than all the gloss of art.

—GOLDSMITH.

Ma Smith was a member of the church referred to in the last chapter, the most prominent one of color in New England. It was situated in the heart of the West End, and was a very valuable piece of property. Every winter this church gave many entertainments to aid in paying off the mortgage, which at this time amounted to about eight thousand dollars. Mrs. Smith, as the chairman of the board of stewardesses, was inaugurating a fair—one that should eclipse anything of a similar nature ever attempted by the colored people, and numerous sewing-circles were being held among the members all over the city. Parlor entertainments where an admission fee of ten cents was collected from every patron, were also greatly in vogue, and the money thus obtained was put into a fund to defray the expense of purchasing eatables and decorations, and paying for the printing of tickets, circulars, etc., for the fair. The strongest forces of the colored people in the vicinity were to combine and lend their aid in making a supreme effort to clear this magnificent property.

Boston contains a number of well-to-do families of color whose tax-bills show a most comfortable return each year to the city treasury.

Strange as it may seem, these well-to-do people, in goodly numbers, distribute themselves and their children among the various Episcopal churches with which the city abounds, the government of which holds out the welcome hand to the brother in black, who is drawn to unite his fortunes with the members of this particular denomination. It may be true that the beautiful ritual of the church is responsible in some measure for this. Colored people are nothing if not beauty-lovers, and for such a people the grandeur of the service has great attractions. But in justice to this church one must acknowledge that it has been instrumental in doing much toward helping this race to help itself, along the lines of brotherly interest.

These people were well represented within the precincts of Mrs. Smith's pretty parlor one afternoon, all desirous of lending their aid to help along the great project.

As we have said, Mrs. Smith occupied the back parlor of the house as her chamber, and within this room the matrons had assembled to take charge of the cutting out of different garments; and here, too, the sewing machine was placed ready for use. In the parlor proper all the young ladies were seated ready to perform any service which might be required of them in the way of putting garments together.

By two o'clock all the members of the sewing-circle were in their places. The parlor was crowded. Mrs. Willis, the brilliant widow of a bright Negro politician, had charge of the girls, and after the sewing had been given out the first business of the meeting was to go over events of interest to the Negro race which had transpired during the week throughout the country. These facts had been previously tabulated upon a blackboard which was placed upon an easel, and occupied a conspicuous position in the room. Each one was supposed to contribute anything of interest that she had read or heard in that time for the benefit of all. After these points had been gone over, Mrs. Willis gave a talk upon some topic of interest. At six o'clock tea was to be served in the kitchen, the company taking refreshment in squads of five. At eight o'clock all unfinished work would be folded and packed way in the convenient little Boston bag, to be finished at home, and the male friends of the various ladies were expected to put in an appearance. Music and recitations were to be enjoyed for two hours, ice cream and cake being sold for the benefit of the cause.

Mrs. Willis was a good example of a class of women of color that came into existence at the close of the Civil War. She was not a *rara avis*, but one of many possibilities which the future will develop from

among the colored women of New England. Every city or town from Maine to New York has its Mrs. Willis. Keen in her analysis of human nature, most people realized, after a short acquaintance, in which they ran the gamut of emotions from strong attraction to repulsion, that she had sifted them thoroughly, while they had gained nothing in return. Shrewd in business matters, many a subtle business man had been worsted by her apparent womanly weakness and charming simplicity. With little money, she yet contrived to live in quiet elegance, even including the little journeys from place to place, so adroitly managed as to increase her influence at home and her fame abroad. Well-read and thoroughly conversant with all current topics, she impressed one as having been liberally educated and polished by travel, whereas a high-school course more than covered all her opportunities.

Even today it is erroneously believed that all racial development among colored people has taken place since emancipation. It is impossible of belief for some, that little circles of educated men and women of color have existed since the Revolutionary War. Some of these people were born free, some have lost the memory of servitude in the dim past; a greater number by far were recruited from the energetic slaves of the South, who toiled when they should have slept, for the money that purchased their freedom, or else they boldly took the rights which man denied. Mrs. Willis was one from among these classes. The history of her descent could not be traced, but somewhere, somehow, a strain of white blood had filtered through the African stream. At sixty odd she was vigorous, well-preserved, broad and comfortable in appearance, with an aureole of white hair crowning a pleasant face.

She had loved her husband with a love ambitious for his advancement. His foot on the stairs mounting to the two-room tenement which constituted their home in the early years of married life, had sent a thrill to her very heart as she sat sewing baby clothes for the always expected addition to the family. But twenty years make a difference in all our lives. It brought many changes to the colored people of New England—social and business changes. Politics had become the open sesame for the ambitious Negro. A seat in the Legislature then was not a dream to this man, urged by the loving woman behind him. Other offices of trust were quickly offered him when his worth became known. He grasped his opportunity; grew richer, more polished, less social, and the family broadened out and overflowed from

old familiar "West End" environments across the River Charles into the aristocratic suburbs of Cambridge. Death comes to us all.

Money, the sinews of living and social standing, she did not possess upon her husband's death. Therefore she was forced to begin a weary pilgrimage—a hunt for the means to help her breast the social tide. The best opening, she decided after looking carefully about her, was in the great cause of the evolution of true womanhood in the work of the "Woman Question" as embodied in marriage and suffrage. She could talk dashingly on many themes, for which she had received much applause in by-gone days, when in private life she had held forth in the drawing-room of some Back Bay philanthropist who sought to use her talents as an attraction for a worthy charitable object, the discovery of a rare species of versatility in the Negro character being a sure drawing-card. It was her boast that she had made the fortunes of her family and settled her children well in life. The advancement of the colored woman should be the new problem in the woman question that should float her upon its tide into the prosperity she desired. And she succeeded well in her plans: conceived in selfishness, they yet bore glorious fruit in the formation of clubs of colored women banded together for charity, for study, for every reason under God's glorious heavens that can better the condition of mankind.

Trivialities are not to be despised. Inborn love implanted in a woman's heart for a luxurious, esthetic home life, running on well-oiled wheels amid flowers, sunshine, books and priceless pamphlets, easy chairs and French gowns, may be the means of developing a Paderewski or freeing a race from servitude. It was amusing to watch the way in which she governed societies and held her position. In her hands committees were as wax, and loud murmurings against the tyranny of her rule died down to judicious whispers. If a vote went contrary to her desires, it was in her absence. Thus she became the pivot about which all the social and intellectual life of the colored people of her section revolved. No one had yet been found with the temerity to contest her position, which, like a title of nobility, bade fair to descend to her children. It was thought that she might be eclipsed by the younger and more brilliant women students on the strength of their alma mater, but she still held her own by sheer force of will-power and indomitable pluck.

The subject of the talk at this meeting was: "The place which

the virtuous woman occupies in upbuilding a race." After a few explanatory remarks, Mrs. Willis said:

"I am particularly anxious that you should think upon this matter seriously, because of its intrinsic value to all of us as race women. I am not less anxious because you represent the coming factors of our race. Shortly, you must fill the positions now occupied by your mothers, and it will rest with you and your children to refute the charges brought against us as to our moral irresponsibility, and the low moral standard maintained by us in comparison with other races."

"Did I understand you to say that the Negro woman in her native state is truly a virtuous woman?" asked Sappho, who had been very silent during the bustle attending the opening of the meeting.

"Travelers tell us that the native African woman is impregnable in her virtue," replied Mrs. Willis.

"So we have sacrificed that attribute in order to acquire civilization," chimed in Dora.

"No, not 'sacrificed,' but pushed one side by the force of circumstances. Let us thank God that it *is* an essential attribute peculiar to us—a racial characteristic which is slumbering but not lost," replied Mrs. Willis. "But let us not forget the definition of virtue—'Strength to do the right thing under all temptations.' Our ideas of virtue are too narrow. We confine them to that conduct which is ruled by our animal passions alone. It goes deeper than that—general excellence in every duty of life is what we may call virtue."

"Do you think, then, that Negro women will be held responsible for all the lack of virtue that is being laid to their charge today? I mean, do you think that God will hold us responsible for the *illegitimacy* with which our race has been obliged, as it were, to flood the world?" asked Sappho.

"I believe that we shall not be held responsible for wrongs which we have *unconsciously* committed, or which we have committed under *compulsion*. We are virtuous or non-virtuous only when we have a *choice* under temptation. We cannot by any means apply the word to a little child who has never been exposed to temptation, nor to the Supreme Being 'who cannot be tempted with evil.' So with the African brought to these shores against his will—the state of morality which implies will-power on his part does not exist, therefore he is not a responsible being. The sin and its punishment lies with the person *consciously* false to his *knowledge* of right. From this we deduce

the truism that 'the civility of no race is perfect whilst another race is degraded.'"

"I shall never forget my feelings," chimed in Anna Stevens, a school teacher of a very studious temperament, "at certain remarks made by the Rev. John Thomas at one of his noonday lectures in the Temple. He was speaking on 'Different Races,' and had in his vigorous style been sweeping his audience with him at a high elevation of thought which was dazzling to the faculties, and almost impossible to follow in some points. Suddenly he touched upon the Negro, and with impressive gesture and lowered voice thanked God that the mu latto race was dying out, because it was a mongrel mixture which combined the worst elements of two races. Lo, the poor mulatto! despised by the blacks of his own race, scorned by the whites! Let him go out and hang himself!" In her indignation Anna forgot the scissors, and bit her thread off viciously with her little white teeth.

Mrs. Willis smiled as she said calmly: "My dear Anna, I would not worry about the fate of the mulatto, for the fate of the mulatto will be the fate of the entire race. Did you never think that today the black race on this continent has developed a race of mulattoes?"

"Why, Mrs. Willis!" came in a chorus of voices.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Willis, still smiling. "It is an incontrovertible truth that there is no such thing as an unmixed black on the American continent. Just bear in mind that we cannot tell by a person's complexion whether he be dark or light in blood, for by the working of the natural laws the white father and black mother produce the mulatto offspring; the black father and white mother the mulatto offspring also, while the *black father* and *quadroon* mother produce the black child, which to the eye alone is a child of unmixed black blood. I will venture to say that out of a hundred apparently pure black men not one will be able to trace an unmixed flow of African blood since landing upon these shores! What an unhappy example of the frailty of all human intellects, when such a man and scholar as Doctor Thomas could so far allow his prejudices to dominate his better judgment as to add one straw to the burden which is popularly supposed to rest upon the unhappy mulattoes of a despised race," finished the lady, with a dangerous flash of her large dark eyes.

"Mrs. Willis," said Dora, with a scornful little laugh, "I am not unhappy, and I am a mulatto. I just enjoy my life, and I don't want to die before my time comes, either. There are lots of good things left on earth to be enjoyed even by mulattoes, and I want my share."

"Yes, my dear; and I hope you may all live and take comfort in the proper joys of your lives. While we are all content to accept life, and enjoy it along the lines which God has laid down for us as individuals as well as a race, we shall be happy and get the best out of life. Now, let me close this talk by asking you to remember one maxim written of your race by a good man: 'Happiness and social position are not to be gained by pushing.' Let the world, by its need of us along certain lines, and our intrinsic fitness for these lines, push us into the niche which God has prepared for us. So shall our lives be beautified and our race raised in the civilization of the future as we grow away from all these prejudices which have been the instruments of our advancement according to the intention of an All-seeing Omnipotence, from the beginning. Never mind our poverty, ignorance, and the slights and injuries which we bear at the hands of a higher race. With the thought ever before us of what the Master suffered to raise all humanity to its present degree of prosperity and intelligence, let us cultivate, while we go about our daily tasks, no matter how inferior they may seem to us, beauty of the soul and mind, which being transmitted to our children by the law of heredity, shall improve the race by eliminating *immorality* from our midst and raising *morality* and virtue to their true place. Thirty-five years of liberty have made us a new people. The marks of servitude and oppression are dropping slowly from us; let us hasten the transformation of the body by the nobility of the soul."

For of the soul the body form doth take,
For soul is form and doth the body make,

quoted Dora.

"Yes," said Mrs. Willis with a smile, "that is the idea exactly, and well expressed. Now I hope that through the coming week you will think of what we have talked about this afternoon, for it is of the very first importance to all people, but particularly so to young folks."

Sappho, who had been thoughtfully embroidering pansies on white linen, now leaned back in her chair for a moment and said: "Mrs. Willis, there is one thing which puzzles me—how are we to overcome the nature which is given us? I mean how can we eliminate passion from our lives, and emerge into the purity which marked the life of Christ? So many of us desire purity and think to have found it,

but in a moment of passion, or under the pressure of circumstances which we cannot control, we commit some horrid sin, and the taint of it sticks and will not leave us, and we grow to loathe ourselves."

"Passion, my dear Miss Clark, is a state in which the will lies dormant, and all other desires become subservient to one. Enthusiasm for any one object or duty may become a passion. I believe that in some degree passion may be beneficial, but we must guard ourselves against a sinful growth of any appetite. All work of whatever character, as I look at it, needs a certain amount of absorbing interest to become successful, and it is here that the Christian life gains its greatest glory in teaching us how to keep ourselves from abusing any of our human attributes. We are not held responsible for compulsory sin, only for the sin that is pleasant to our thoughts and palatable to our appetites. All desires and hopes with which we are endowed are good in the sight of God, only it is left for us to discover their right uses. Do I cover your ground?"

"Yes and no," replied Sappho; "but perhaps at some future time you will be good enough to talk with me personally upon this subject."

"Dear child, sit here by me. It is a blessing to look at you. Beauty like yours is inspiring. You seem to be troubled; what is it? If I can comfort or strengthen, it is all I ask." She pressed the girl's hand in hers and drew her into a secluded corner. For a moment the floodgates of suppressed feeling flew open in the girl's heart, and she longed to lean her head on that motherly breast and unburden her sorrows there.

"Mrs. Willis, I am troubled greatly," she said at length.

"I am *so* sorry; tell me, my love, what it is all about."

Just as the barriers of Sappho's reserve seemed about to be swept away, there followed, almost instantly, a wave of repulsion toward this woman and her effusiveness, so forced and insincere. Sappho was very impressionable, and yielded readily to the influence which fell like a cold shadow between them. She drew back as from an abyss suddenly beheld stretching before her.

"On second thoughts, I think I ought to correct my remarks. It is not really *trouble*, but more a desire to confirm me in my own ideas."

"Well, if you feel you are right, dear girl, stand for the uplifting of the race and womanhood. Do not shrink from duty."

"It was simply a thought raised by your remarks on morality. I

once knew a woman who had sinned. No one in the community in which she lived knew it but herself. She married a man who would have despised her had he known her story; but as it is, she is looked upon as a pattern of virtue for all women."

"And then what?" asked Mrs. Willis, with a searching glance at the fair face beside her.

"Ought she not to have told her husband before marriage? Was it not her duty to have thrown herself upon his clemency?"

"I think not," replied Mrs. Willis dryly. "See here, my dear, I am a practical woman of the world, and I think your young woman builded wiser than she knew. I am of the opinion that most men are like the lower animals in many things—they don't always know what is for their best good. If the husband had been left to himself, he probably would not have married the one woman in the world best fitted to be his wife. I think in her case she did her duty."

"Ah, that word 'duty.' What is our duty?" queried the girl, with a sad droop to the sensitive mouth. "It is so hard to know our duty. We are told that all hidden things shall be revealed. Must repented and atoned-for sin rise at last to be our curse?"

"Here is a point, dear girl. God does not look upon the constitution of sin as we do. His judgment is not ours; ours is finite, his infinite. *Your* duty is not to be morbid, thinking these thoughts that have puzzled older heads than yours. *Your* duty is, also, to be happy and bright for the good of those about you. Just blossom like the flowers, have faith and *trust.*" At this point the entrance of the men made an interruption, and Mrs. Willis disappeared in a crowd of other matrons. Sappho was impressed in spite of herself, by the woman's words. She sat buried in deep thought.

There was evidently more in this woman than appeared upon the surface. With all the centuries of civilization and culture that have come to this grand old world, no man has yet been found able to trace the windings of God's inscrutable ways. There are men and women whose seeming uselessness fit perfectly into the warp and woof of Destiny's web. All things work together for good.